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### MONTEFIORE'S COMMENTARY ON THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

A work on the Synoptic Gospels<sup>1</sup> from this well-known exponent of liberal Judaism in England has for us a double interest, as revealing the attitude of a liberal Jew toward the founder of Christianity and as shedding the light of Jewish scholarship upon the problems of gospel interpretation. There is much less of the latter in these volumes than we could wish, but the lack is to be supplied by a volume of "additional notes" prepared by I. Abrahams, Reader in Talmudic and Rabbinic Literature in the University of Cambridge, and promised for an early date.

The primary purpose of Montefiore's books is to furnish Jewish readers the latest results of critical study upon the first three gospels. This is done not merely to satisfy curiosity but because the author believes this literature has genuine religious value for Jews. Hence he is less concerned to make an original contribution to interpretation than to serve as a mediator between the intelligent Jewish public and modern Christian commentators; though he does not refrain from pointing out where, in his opinion, the latter have shown ignorance of Jewish thought or have made prejudiced statements. Yet the author's attitude toward the gospels is always appreciative, and he aims to have his readers cultivate a similar frame of mind.

After an introduction of about a hundred pages dealing with literary and historical questions, the gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke are taken up in order. First, the whole gospel is printed in a new translation which does not differ essentially from that of the Revised Version. This is done in order that one who may be coming to this literature for the first time may read the story as it stands undisturbed by remarks or even by verse divisions. The commentary proper prints the translation again, section by section, with comments. These notes do not pretend to be exhaustive, the main purpose being to concentrate attention upon those passages which have religious value or interest for Jewish readers today. Among the authorities cited, Loisy seems to be drawn upon oftenest and at greatest length. The views of Wellhausen, J. Weiss, H. J. Holtzmann, and a few others, are referred to frequently. These citations, interwoven with the writer's own reflections, make an

<sup>1</sup> *The Synoptic Gospels*. Edited with an Introduction and Commentary by C. G. Montefiore. New York and London: Macmillan, 1909. cviii+1118 pages, Vols. I and II. \$5.00.

interesting and informing body of interpretation. Problems of historicity, literary priority, and exegesis receive attention whenever they seem to have value for the Jewish student.

Christian readers will naturally be interested in the estimate of Jesus here presented. Historically, he is assumed to have preached the imminent end of the world. At first he may not have regarded himself as the Messiah, yet he early came to this conviction—just how or when we are not told. His preaching of final judgment overshadowed, at least in the early period, any thought of the personal or individual element, and righteousness was to be the keynote of the new kingdom as well as the passport of admission within its gates (p. 51 ff.). The terms in which he ultimately conceived his messiahship included the national and apocalyptic ideas, with the added thought of service, even a lowly service and a work which was for the present to culminate in death. He believed that the mysterious Man of Daniel 7:13 was himself—"himself as he was to be in his glory, rather than himself as he then was."

Jesus' significance for modern religion, so far as Jews are concerned, is estimated highly. There is a certain spirit and glow about his teaching which gives it the characteristics of genius. "It is great, stimulating, heroic." In comparison, a compendium of rabbinic ethics and religion is "average teaching"; Jews need, "in addition to the admirable sayings and exhortations of the rabbis, the ideal and heroic spirit which inspires the teaching of the Synoptic Gospels," though of course there is much in the gospels to which the Jew will always take exception (p. cv., f.). He can recognize the fundamental moral and religious elements in the Sermon on the Mount, he can put aside the vexed question of Jesus' originality, but Christians must recognize that the world has been satiated with Christology even to nausea; they must put more stress upon Jesus' teaching and less upon the church's teaching about him. "Christianity and Judaism must gradually approach each other. The one must shed the teachings which Jesus did not teach, the other must acknowledge more fully, more frankly, than has yet been done, what he did and was for religion and for the world" (p. 594). These are significant words.

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